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Program immerses students in health care

Yearlong class for 15 teens addresses need for workers

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Lansing State Journal

Off a corridor walked by nurses and doctors, near labs and medical offices, a high school classroom waits in one corner of Sparrow Hospital.

It will be a hub for 15 students serious about exploring health care careers this fall, the first participants in a promising tricounty project.

Unlike traditional vocational courses, these teens will be literally surrounded by their future industry of interest for half of each school day.

They'll see perspectives from blood work to business and venture out to other medical facilities, big and small, many soon to run short of trained professionals - if they haven't already.

"We really want to show kids what's possible in this field," said Kathy Tomlanovich, who oversees career education for the Ingham Intermediate School District.

She and other local educators understand the need - mid-Michigan will require about 7,000 health care workers by 2012 because of a growing need for

Education partners

The Capital Area Healthcare Education partners are:

- Burcham Hills Retirement Community
- Capital Health Care and Employment Council
- Clinton Memorial Hospital
- Eaton Intermediate School District
- Eaton Rapids Medical Center
- Hayes Green Beach Memorial Hospital
- Ingham Intermediate School District (Capital Area Career Academy)
- Ingham Regional Medical Center
- Kellogg Foundation
- Lansing Community College
- Lansing School District (Hill Career Academy)
- Prima Civitas Foundation
- Sparrow Health System

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services and an aging pool of professionals, according to a 2005 study by Capital Area Michigan Works.

And the industry immersion concept already has worked locally. Graduates of the 10-year-old LAMP program, or Lansing Area Manufacturing Partnership, have shown they're more likely to attend college or land higher-paying jobs after one year attending "class" inside of General Motors Corp. plants.

Support for the new Capital Area Healthcare Education Partnership rolled in: Seven area health institutions signed on, the Prima Civitas Foundation awarded a \$20,000 development grant and Lansing Community College agreed to accept credits.

Organizers still are building curriculum, crafting what they say is an unduplicated early direction in health care education. The juniors and seniors will get a taste of many medical jobs, systems and the overall skills employer seek.

Each student also will be assigned a mentor in a field that matches his or her interests.

"I hope to gain a better knowledge of how things work behind what you see," said Alexa Brockman, a Haslett High School student who's curious about nutrition and the business side of medicine. "You get to say, 'Could I see myself doing this for the rest of my life?' and that's really important."

The yearlong program is intended to be broader than courses for students interested in specific jobs, such as paramedics and nurse assistants, now offered through the Capital Area Career Academy in Mason or the Hill Career Academy in Lansing.

It's too late to sign up now, but organizers expect to take more than 15 teens in the second year. Ingham Regional Medical Center also may join Sparrow in hosting instructors and a classroom, potentially serving up to 100 students.

A spring information meeting attracted about 80 students from the Lansing School District and high schools in Ingham, Eaton and Clinton counties.

Michael Flowers, who's administering the program for Sparrow, said the health system welcomes the opportunity to help train potential employees in a different way.

Sparrow already hires many local students who complete school-operated courses and its own summer internships for patient care technicians.

"If we can start preparing students for the future, this is it," he said. "Instead of having kids exit Michigan and the area, why not grow our own and maintain them here in mid-Michigan?"

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